

1357. d.

A  
**DEFENCE**  
OF OUR

SAVIOUR'S MIRACLE

OF

*Curſing the Fig-Tree.*

In Answer to

Mr *WOOLSTON*'s  
Discourſe thereon.

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With a new *Interpretation* of *Mark xi, 13.*  
and the Inſufficiency of former *Interpre-*  
*tations*, humbly offered to the Conſide-

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BY  
*WILLIAM BOWMAN*, M. A.  
VICAR of *Dewsbury* in *Yorkſhire*.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for *STEPHEN AUSTEN*, at the  
*Angel and Bible* in *St Paul's Church-Yard*.

MDCCXXI.

Pr. 6d.

# DEFENCE

OF OUR

SAVINGS BANK

OF

THE FUTURE

In Answer to

MR. WOOD'S CHALLENGE

Dispute thereon

With a new system of  
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WILLIAM WOODWARD  
Vice President



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T O T H E

Right Reverend Father in God

**E D M U N D,**

By Divine Permission,

Lord Bishop of **L O N D O N.**

**M Y L O R D,**



**H E** uncommon Zeal,  
with which your  
**L O R D S H I P** has all  
along opposed the  
prevailing Cause of Infidelity,  
seems to point out a Patron to  
every one who is willing to con-  
tribute



tribute to the Support of Religion, at this dangerous Juncture. For which Reason, the Design of the following little Tract is a sufficient Apology for troubling your LORDSHIP with it.

THE glorious Cause of Christianity has been long in a drooping Condition, and notwithstanding the many brave Attempts that have been made to recover it, seems daily to lose Ground and tend to Decay. For while the natural Depravity of Mankind continues, Prejudice shall reign triumphant, and every Opiate administer'd to the Conscience, in

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in order to Lull it into a fatal Security, shall be swallowed with an extraordinary Pleasure.

AND sure, my LORD, never Age teem'd with Prescriptions of this sort, like ours; an Age that has seen Vice seriously recommended, Infidelity professedly inculcated, and the grand Criterion of Revelation ludicrously exposed.

AND shall we, who are set apart for sacred Things, batten in Ease, and dream on in a dull lazy Lethargy of Indolence, when the Enemy advances so fast upon us, and your LORDSHIP'S Example shines so bright before us?

IF there is any thing in the following Sheets worthy of your LORDSHIP'S Notice, pardon the officious Zeal of a young Man, who is desirous to render all his Labours subservient to Religion, and thinks himself obliged to neglect no Opportunity of being useful in his Function.

AND as no Season is improper for a Clergyman to appear in the Defence of Truth, so the many truly pious and learned Writings in the Controversy wherein I am engag'd, have yet left Room for an Attempt of this Nature.

PERHAPS

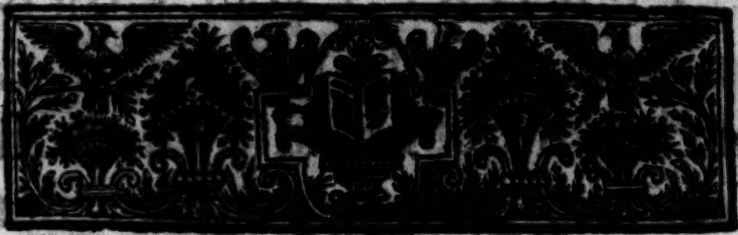
PERHAPS your LORDSHIP may find something new in this little Treatise; at least the very Attempt cannot but be of some Service to Christianity, which shall always be the utmost Endeavour of

MY LORD,

*Your LORDSHIP'S  
most Obedient Servant,*

William Bowman.





THE  
PREFACE.

**T**HIS little Treatise, drawn up some time ago, had not probably appeared in the World just at this Juncture, but for some malicious Reflections that of late have been cast upon me, as a Favourer of Mr Woolston's Infidelity.

IT has been the learned Design of those formidable Polemists, that have writ against me, to lay aside, as a stale and formal Fashion, the Use of Reason and Argumentation, and to attack me with the more modish Artillery of Billingsgate. Those brave Champions for Priestcraft, diffident of their Cause, and  
dispairing

*despairing to confute what has hitherto appear'd reasonable to all wise Men, have contrived, by casting an Odium upon my Sermon, to bring it's Reader Prejudic'd to it, and consequently to render it ineffectual.*

*TO this End I have been incessantly complemented with the Titles, of Heretic, Apostate, Infidel, Ignoramus, Blunderer, and the like; Opinions have been framed for me; I am made to mean a thousand Things beside what I say. If I find fault with a haughty enthusiastic Clergyman, I am for destroying the Church of England; If I cannot allow Episcopacy to be essential to Christianity, I strike at the Foundation of all Reveal'd Religion; If I say that the Church is not independant of the State, I am purposely recommending Vice and Immorality.*

*THESE are the common Topics of Answering my Sermon, which as they have been justly censur'd by all the discerning part of Mankind I shall therefore pass over unregarded.*

*I ONCE*

I ONCE indeed thought to have given the Publick a full Defence of myself. But as nothing (after mature Deliberation) has yet been said against me but what is a sufficient Confutation of itself, I have rather chosen to leave those Insects of a Day to their own perishable Nature, assuring the World that when I see any Thing worth the Trouble of answering I shall readily do it. Till then let the following Discourse, at least bespeak me a Christian, and let Charity persuade every one to believe me (what I solemnly profess to be) sincere in what I have written.

A D E.





DEFENCE

OF OUR

SAVIOUR'S MIRACLE

*Of Cursing the Fig-Tree, &c.*

 BEFORE I proceed to answer Mr *Woolston's* Objections against this Miracle, it may be necessary to set down the Substance of what he says upon it. Which is as follows.

“ THE Miracle, says he, of *Jesus's*  
“ *cursing the Fig-Tree* for not bearing Fruit  
“ out of Season, upon the bare Mention of  
“ it, appears to be such an absurd, foolish,  
“ and ridiculous, if not malicious and ill-  
“ natur'd, Act; that I question whether

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“ for

“ for Folly and Absurdity, it can be e-  
 “ qualled in any Instance of the Life of a  
 “ reputed wise Man.

“ *JESUS* was hungry it seems, and  
 “ being disappointed of Figs to the Satis-  
 “ faction of his Appetite, cursed the Fig-  
 “ Tree. Why so peevish and impatient?  
 “ Our Divines make *Jesus* the most pa-  
 “ tient, resign’d, and easy under Sufferings,  
 “ Troubles, and Disappointments, of any  
 “ Man. If he really was so, he could  
 “ hardly have been out of Humour so  
 “ much, for want of a few Figs to the  
 “ Allay of his Hunger. But to curse the  
 “ Fig-Tree upon it, was as foolishly and  
 “ passionately done, as for another Man  
 “ to throw the Chairs and Stools about  
 “ the House, because his Dinner is not  
 “ ready at a critical Time, or before it  
 “ cou’d be got ready for him.

“ BUT *Jesus* was hungry, some will  
 “ say, and the Disappointment provoked  
 “ him. What if he was hungry? He  
 “ shou’d, as he knew the Return of his  
 “ Appetite, have made a better and more  
 “ certain Provision for it, and never have  
 “ trusted to the uncertain Fruits of a Fig-  
 “ Tree,

“ Tree, which he espy’d at a Distance, for  
 “ his Breakfast.

“ A N D if *Jesus* was frustrated of a  
 “ long’d for Meal of Figs, what need he have  
 “ so reveng’d the Disappointment on the  
 “ senseless and fruitless Tree? Was it be-  
 “ cause he was forced to fast longer than was  
 “ usual and expedient? Not so, I hope,  
 “ neither: Cou’d not Angels, if he was in  
 “ a desert Place, have administer’d unto  
 “ him? Or could not he miraculously have  
 “ created Bread for himself and his Com-  
 “ pany? What Occasion then for his being  
 “ out of Humour for Want of Food?

“ B U T what is yet worse, *The Time of*  
 “ *Figs was not yet*, when *Jesus* look’d and  
 “ long’d for them. He could not but know  
 “ this before he came to the Tree; and if  
 “ he had any Consideration, he would not  
 “ have expected Figs on it, much less have  
 “ so resented the Want of them. What,  
 “ if a *Yeoman of Kent* should go to look  
 “ for Pippins in his Orchard at *Easter*, and  
 “ because of a Disappointment, cut down  
 “ all his Trees? What then would his  
 “ Neighbours make of him? Nothing less  
 “ than a Laughing-Stock; and if the Sto-



“ ry got into our publick News, he would  
 “ be the Jest and Ridicule of Mankind.

“ A G A I N, I wou'd gladly know  
 “ whose Fig-Tree this was, or whether  
 “ *Jesus* had any legal Right to the Fruit,  
 “ if haply he had found any on it; or any  
 “ Leave or Authority to smite it with a  
 “ Curse for it's Unfruitfulness? As to the  
 “ Tree's being *Jesus's* Property that could  
 “ not be; for he was so far for being  
 “ either Landlord or Tenant, that 'tis said,  
 “ he *had not where to lay his Head*. How  
 “ then had he any Right to the Figs, if  
 “ he had met with any? And if he had  
 “ no Right to the Fruit, much less to  
 “ smite the Tree with a Curse: Where  
 “ was his Honour, his Justice, his Good-  
 “ ness, and his Honesty, in this Act?

“ H A D *Jesus*, instead of cursing the  
 “ Fig-Tree, made a dry, dead, and wi-  
 “ ther'd one, immediately to bud, flou-  
 “ rish, and revive, and in an Instant to  
 “ bring forth ripe Fruits out of Season;  
 “ such an Instance of his Power had been  
 “ an indisputable Miracle: Such an In-  
 “ stance of his divine Power had carry'd  
 “ Goodness along with it, and none of the  
 “ fore said

“ foreſaid Exceptions cou’d have been  
 “ made to it: Such an Inſtance of his Al-  
 “ mighty Power, had been a Demonſtration  
 “ of his being Lord of the Creation, and  
 “ Author of the Fruits of the Earth for the  
 “ Uſe of Man, in their Season, or he  
 “ cou’d not have produced them out of  
 “ Season. Such an Inſtance of his Power  
 “ would have been like his Miracles of  
 “ healing Diſeaſes, of making the languid  
 “ ſound, and the feeble ſtrong; and we  
 “ might more certainly have inſerr’d from  
 “ one with the other, that both were the  
 “ Operations of a good God. But this  
 “ Inſtance of his curſing the Fig-Tree in  
 “ this Faſhion ſpoils the Credit, and ſul-  
 “ lies the Glory of his other Miracles.  
 “ The Spirit of *Chriſt*, who is all *Love*  
 “ and *Mercy*, ſhou’d, one wou’d think,  
 “ breathe forth nothing but Goodneſs and  
 “ Kindneſs to Mankind; but that ſuch a pe-  
 “ ſtilential Blaſt, like a peſtiferous North-  
 “ eaſt Wind in ſome Seasons, ſhou’d pro-  
 “ ceed from his Mouth, to the Deſtru-  
 “ ction of another Man’s harmleſs and  
 “ inoffenſive Tree, is what none upon  
 “ Earth can account for.

“ BUT

“ BUT after all, it may be questioned,  
 “ whether this Work was miraculous, and  
 “ whether there was not more of the Craft  
 “ of Man, than the Power of God in it:  
 “ What if *Jesus* took a secret Opportunity  
 “ beforehand to lay his Carpenter's Ax to  
 “ the Root of the Tree, and so imper-  
 “ ceptibly circumcised it, as to make it  
 “ wither away?

THIS is the Substance of what Mr *Woolston* offers in his Discourse upon this Miracle of our *Saviour*. Where we may observe, his Method of arguing is from the Absurdities which, he pretends, occur in the Relation.

THE Absurdities he here mentions are four.

I. *THAT* 'tis inconsistent with the Character of *JESUS* to suppose him driven to that Extremity of Hunger as to make him angry or out of Humour; and that his cursing the Fig-Tree, because it had not Fruit to satisfy his Hunger, was a passionate and ill-natur'd Act.

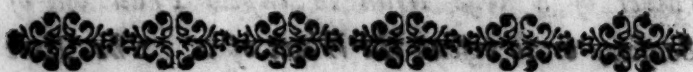


II. *THAT 'tis inconsistent with the Character of a wise Man to expect Fruit out of Season, or to resent the Want of it. The Time of Figs was not yet.*

III. *SUPPOSING there had been Fruit on the Tree, yet Jesus had no legal Right to eat of it; nor, if none, to curse it for it's Unfruitfulness.*

IV. *THAT to destroy another Man's harmless and inoffensive Tree, is an Act of such a malignant and Diabolical Nature, as to be inconsistent with the Character of a good and gracious God.*

TO Mr Woolston's Insinuation, that such a seeming Miracle may be brought about by natural Means, I shall not vouchsafe an Answer, till he can bring better Evidence for such a Fact, than his own inconsistent Suppositions. In the mean Time, I shall speak to his pretended Absurdities in their proper Order, by treating of each of them in a distinct Section.



## S E C T. I.

**T**IS inconsistent with the Character of Jesus, to suppose him driven to that Extremity of Hunger, as to make him angry or out of Humour; and his cursing the Fig-Tree is a passionate and ill-natur'd Act.

TO suppose the holy Jesus passionate and ill-natur'd at any Disappointment whatsoever, is indeed inconsistent with that Meekness, Patience, and Easiness of Temper, which is every where attributed to him. The Lamb of God was ever meek and lowly, He was oppress'd and he was afflicted and yet he open'd not his Mouth, he was brought as a Lamb to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before her Shearers is dumb, so he open'd not his Mouth\*. But to imagine, with Mr Woolston, that it was not from his own Nature, but his

\* Isa. liii. 7.

Power of supplying himself with Food in a supernatural Manner, when ever his Appetite requir'd it, that he cou'd not be angry or out of Humour at this Disappointment, is a Supposition of an uncommon Stamp.

THAT our Saviour, when he took on him the Nature of Man, subjected himself to all it's Weaknesses and Infirmities, Sin only excepted, is not only the Doctrine of the Holy Scripture, but an Essential Requisite of his Mediatorship. *For we have not an High-Priest which cannot be touch'd with the Feeling of our Infirmities; but was in all Points tempted like as we are, yet without Sin\**. In Consequence of this Incarnation he became liable to the painful Sollicitations of Hunger and Thirst, and all the other uneasy Attendants of human Nature. Of these frequent Mention is made in the Gospel.

'TIS true, He had it always in his Power to supply all his Wants, and to ward off every Evil, in an extraordinary and miraculous Manner. As he could have

\* Heb. iv. 15.



*pray'd to his Father and he wou'd have given him more than twelve Legions of Angels* †, to minister unto him upon any Emergency; so he could have turn'd the hard Rocks into Bread, and commanded all Nature to assist with her choicest Delicacies at his Table. But these miraculous Operations were to be reserv'd for more proper Occasions, than to allay the ordinary Returns of Hunger and Thirst. To make Use of Omnipotence to avoid any little painful Sensation, incident to human Nature, wou'd have made Miracles too cheap to answer the great End of his performing them, and wou'd to purpose have sapp'd the Foundation of that Religion, they were to give so eminent an Attestation to. Miracles are the great Criterion of Revelation; but when those extraordinary Performances become ordinary and common, that Veneration, which is due to such omnipotent Acts, lessens in sad Proportion, as their Frequency makes them less taken Notice of.

THUS tho' 'tis inconsistent with the Character of the blessed *Jesus*, to suppose him angry or out of Humour at the Disappointment he met with, so 'tis likewise inconsistent

† Matth. xxvi. 53.

inconsistent with his Character, to suppose him working Miracles upon every trifling Occasion, or calling down the august Ministry of Heaven to prepare his ordinary Food.

BUT is not *Jesus's* cursing the Fig-Tree, because it had not wherewith to satisfy his Hunger, a passionate and ill-natur'd Act?

WAS this indeed the only Reason of our Saviour's cursing the Fig-Tree, because it had not wherewith to satisfy his hungry Appetite, there wou'd have been some ground for this Presumption; this indeed wou'd be like a Man's throwing the Chairs and Stools about the House, because his Dinner is not ready at a critical Time, or before it cou'd be got ready for him. Our Saviour, 'tis true, being hungry, and seeing a Fig-Tree afar off having Leaves, he came, if haply he might find any Thing thereon; but finding Nothing but Leaves he cursed it saying, \* Let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever, and presently the Fig-Tree wither'd away. But why should we impute this Act of Execra-

\* Matth. xxi. 19.

tion to the Disappointment our *Saviour* met with, when the Evangelist asserts no such Thing? Why shou'd we not rather say, that our *Saviour* being disappointed of his Expectations, as to meeting with Fruit, but finding at the same Time a proper Subject to work a Miracle upon, and not only a bare Miracle, but such a Miracle as shou'd exhibit a Typical and Prophetical Representation of what shou'd hereafter come to pass, he was immediately determin'd to do it?

NOTHING could so well represent the pompous and hypocritical Appearance of the wicked *Jews*, as this gay, leafy, but fruitless Tree. Those that did all their Works to be seen of Men, that made broad their *Phylacteries*, and loved Greeting in the Markets; those that would scrupulously pay Tythe of Mint, Anise, and Cummin, but cou'd omit the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, and Truth; those that made clean the outside of the Cup and Platter, but within were full of Extortion and Excess; those I say, could not have been more exactly typified, than by this Tree, which made so splendid an Appearance at a Distance, whose green and flourishing Leaves promised



miss'd a Plenty of Fruit to the Beholders,  
but was inwardly barren and unfruitful.

AND as the final Destruction of the  
*Jews* was for their Unfruitfulness and Hy-  
pocrisy, in a short Time to be accomplish-  
ed, as our *Saviour* had expressly foretold;  
the apposite Representation thereof, by the  
sudden withering away of the Fig-Tree,  
was instantly suggested to our *Saviour*, and  
therefore it was not improperly curst by  
him in order thereto.

THIS was undoubtedly the Reason and  
Motive of this Act of Execration, in which,  
if any Thing of Passion or ill-nature can  
be imputed to our *Saviour*, I leave any un-  
prejudiced Person to judge.

A TYPE is a lively and visible Re-  
presentation of what shall be hereafter; But  
the Advantages of the foremention'd Type  
in particular are so plain and manifest, that  
but to mention them wou'd be an Affront  
to the Understanding of my Reader. Nor  
is it any Derogation from the Divinity of  
our *Saviour*, that he was baulk'd in his Ex-  
pectations of Fruit. For tho' he was *per-*  
*fect* God, yet was he also *perfect* Man; of  
*distinct*

*distinct Substance, tho' Unity of Person*; and, in the common and ordinary Actions of Life, was no more assisted by the Divinity, than other pious and good Men. Of this, that remarkable Text, *Matth. xiii. 32.* his Agonies in the Garden of *Gethsemane*, and the Horrors of his Mind upon the *Cross*, are a sufficient and convincing Evidence.



## SECT.



## S E C T. II.

**T**IS inconsistent with the Character of a wise Man to expect Fruit out of Season, or to resent the necessary Want of it. The Time of Figs was not yet.

THIS indeed seems to be something to Mr Woolston's Purpose, and has been, long before his Time, a Stone of Stumbling, and a Rock of Offence. For a Man to expect Fruit at a Season, when 'tis impossible to be had, is certainly an imprudent, rash, and unreasonable Thing.

IN order, therefore, to vindicate our Saviour from this Imputation, it will be necessary to shew, that he did not expect Figs at an improper Season; and likewise, so to interpret the Words of the *Evangelist* as to warrant such an Exposition.

NOW



NOW it is evident from the Writings of the *Evangelists*, that this Action of our *Saviour* happen'd just before the *Feast* of the *Jewish Passover*; which was always kept upon the fourteenth Day of the Month *Nisan*, about the latter End of our *March*. And that in *Judea* there were *Figs* at this Time, is no less evident. *Pliny* says expressly, that in the *East Figs* are at Maturity in the first Month, which the *Hebrews* call *NISAN*, and the *Romans* *MARCH*. *Aristophanes* observes, that in the Spring (*Χω' πρὸ θ' ὁ κήρυξ ἔποι κήρυ*) when the *Cuckow* sings, the *Phœnicians* \* cut their *Wheat* and *Barley*. And by the Law of *Moses* on the second Day of *Unleavened Bread*, two Days after the *Passover*, the *Jews* were to offer up to God the *First-Fruits* of their *Harvest*. *Lev. xxiii.* But *Philo* tells us, that when the *Corn* was ready, the *Trees* brought forth their *Fruit*.

\* *Phœnicia* and the *Land of Canaan* are the same. The same *Woman* whom *St Matthew* calls a *Woman of Canaan*, xv. 22. is called by *St Mark* a *Syrophœnician*, iv. 26. *Saul* is call'd, by the *LXX*, the Son of *φωινίκης*, *Exod. vi. 15.* and of *καναϊνίδος* *Gen. xvi. 10.* and for *Canaan* in the *Hebrew* the *LXX* have *φωινίκης* or *φωινίκων*, *Josh. v. 1.* *Exod. xvi. 35.*

SOLOMON

SOLOMON, in his Book of *Canticles*, gives us this Sign of the Spring being come, that the Fig-Tree putteth forth her green Figs, ii. 13. Now if the Figs were so forward in the Spring (which in *Judea* is about the middle of January) what must they be, in so fruitful a Climate, about the latter End of *March*.

THUS it evidently appears (without adding any more Instances) that there were Figs in *Judea* at the Time our Saviour look'd for them. The only Difficulty now remaining is to make the Words of *St Mark* agree with what has been said above.

IN order to this, the learned *Hemsius* thinks these Words of the Evangelist, Οὐ γὰρ ἦν καιρὸς σύκων, ought to be read, Οὐ γὰρ ἦν, καιρὸς σύκων, for where he was, it was the Time of Figs.

OTHERS, with Mr *Woolston*, have thought proper to read the Words, by way of Interrogation. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν καιρὸς σύκων; for was it not the Time of Figs?

D AND

AND to make these Words the Reason of our *Saviour's* going up to the Fig-Tree, in Expectation of finding Fruit thereon, the Abettors of the forementioned Opinions are forc'd to include, in a Parenthesis, that Part of the Verse, *and when he came to it he found Nothing but Leaves*: So that the Verse will then run thus; *And seeing a Fig-Tree afar off, having Leaves, he came, if haply he might find any Thing thereon, (and when he came to it he found Nothing but Leaves) for was it not the Time of Figs? Or in the former sense; for where he was, it was the Time of Figs.*

BUT as these pretend no Authority for this singular Way of Reading but their own capricious Fancies; as they are of so barbarous a Nature, and so inconsistent with the Purity and Correctness of this holy *Evangelist*, no wise Man can assent to such an Alteration. The Words Οὐ γὰρ ἦν καιρὸς σύκων, however to be interpreted, must certainly have Relation to the preceeding Words, 'Οὐδὲν εὗρεν εἰ μὴ φύλλα, and not these distant ones, ἦλθεν εἰ ἄρα εὐρήσῃ τι ἐν αὐτῇ, For I appeal to any one that understands Language, if  
any



any Thing can be more harsh or ungrammatical than this latter Way of Reading.

THE same Imputation of Barbarism lies upon those who wou'd understand by these Words, that *the Time of gathering of Figs was not yet come*, by Reason of the last Words not having relation to the preceeding, but remote Action, *He came, if if haply he might find any Thing thereon, for the Time of gathering of Figs was not yet come.*

OTHERS think it the clearest Solution of this Difficulty; to suppose (what is certainly true) that there are different kinds of Fig-Trees in *Judea*, which bring their Fruit to Maturity at different Times, the one much later than the other; that the Time when the later Figs are ripe (probably about *August* or *September*) is in common Propriety called *the Time of Figs*; that therefore at the *Passover* the *Time of Figs was not come*, tho' some Trees might have Fruit at this Time; that our Saviour was in Hopes this was one of the early Kind, but when he came to it, he found it one of the ordinary Sort, which had no Fruit upon it.

HOWEVER specious this Solution may seem, yet, I conceive, it is nevertheless liable to Objection. For 'tis absurd to suppose, so circumstantial a Writer as St Mark would have forgot to tell us, that our Saviour had been mistaken in the Kind of the Tree, if that had been the Case. Wou'd he have said in general Terms, that *the Time of Figs was not yet come*, when it was only in the particular sort of the Tree that the Mistake was. Suppose a Man, at the Beginning of Autumn, seeing a Peach-Tree at a Distance, should go up to it, in hopes of finding Fruit upon it, knowing Peaches were at that Time ripe; but coming there should find it a Tree that brought not it's Fruit to Perfection till Michaelmas: Wou'd an Historian relating this Fact say, *He found no Fruit, for Michaelmas was not yet come?* Wou'd he not rather say, *He was mistaken in the Tree, for it was one that bore Michaelmas Fruit.* Why shou'd we then make our sacred Historian guilty of an Absurdity we shou'd laugh at in a profane one? Beside, I believe, it will admit of some Doubt, whether all the Time, from the Beginning of the early,

to the End of the later Fruit, may not properly be called the Time of Figs. I am sure 'tis no Impropriety in our Nation.

I SHALL but just mention the next Interpretation; *He found Nothing but Leaves, for it was not a season of Figs, i. e. the Year did not abound with Figs, or it was (as we say) a scarce Year for Figs.* I say, I shall but just mention this; because, 1<sup>st</sup>. It's being a scarce Year for Figs can be no direct Reason, why our *Saviour* shou'd find none upon the Tree; and 2<sup>dly</sup>. If it had been a Year in which there were no Figs, our *Saviour* must have known it before.

THUS are there manifest Absurdities in all those pretended Solutions I have hitherto mention'd. I shall therefore, without any Apology, offer what I think a proper Solution of this Difficulty, and what I presume must be acknowledg'd the Meaning of the *Evangelist*, since 'tis not only free from the forementioned Absurdities, but has a more immediate Relation to the Design of our *Saviour*, than any other Interpretation can possibly have

I BEG



I BEG Leave therefore to translate the Words in this Manner. *And seeing a Fig-Tree afar off, having Leaves, he came, if haply he might find any Thing thereon; and when he came to it, he found nothing but Leaves, for the Time of it's bearing Figs was not yet come. i. e. Tho' it had been planted a sufficient Time, and made a fair shew at a Distance, yet was it nevertheless a barren and unfruitful Tree, and had never yet bore Fruit.*

I OWN that the Word *καιρός* is more generally taken for a revolving Season, for a Space of Time that after such and such stated Revolutions returns again. But it is likewise often used in a determinate Sense, and signifies one particular stated Part of Time, which never was before, nor shall ever return. This is evident from St *Luke* xx. 10. *καὶ ἐν καιρῷ ἀπέστειλε πρὸς τοὺς γεωργοὺς δοῦλον. And at the Season he sent a Servant to the Husbandmen.* Neither the Sense of the Text, nor the Meaning of the Parable will allow us to take *καιρῷ* here for the annual Season of gathering the Fruit,

Fruit, but only for that determinate Time when the Vineyard shou'd first begin to bring forth Fruit. The Author to the *Romans* uses the Word in the same Sense, chap. v. ver. 6. κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἁσθεῶν ἀπέθανε. In due time Christ died for the ungodly. Καιρὸς τοῦ περὶ αὐτῶν is an Expression of *Demosthenes*, καιρὸν τηρεῖν of *Aristotle*. I might shew innumerable Instances to the same Purpose, but these alone are sufficient.

THAT this is the true Interpretation appears from *Luke* xiii. 6. which Expositors agree to be an Allusion to this Action of our Saviour. Behold these three Years I come seeking Fruit on this Tree, and find none (i. e. these three Years, according to the common Course of Nature, this Tree shou'd have bore Fruit, but these three Years has it deceiv'd my Expectation) cut it down

why cumbereth it the Ground. *Never was a Tree*

AND if this Interpretation be thus authorized, how much more, when we consider the Event of which this Act is design'd a Type. The Jews, who had been

*Picture of the Jewish people than such a Tree*  
*he came to his own people (the Jews) & they ever, received him not. But for the 3 successive years, as he preached to them, they did but bind themselves the more against him & his doctrine! True Sons of the world, they sought only for the most gross fulfilment of their Avarice, Lust, Ambition & not his pure spiritual Kingdom*

ever, above all other People, the peculiar Favourites of Heaven, were design'd by God, for their Unfruitfulness, to be cut off from off the Earth. And as the withering away of this Fig-Tree was to be a Type of their Destruction, so the Tree in its flourishing Condition was a Type of their Lives. It's pompous and gay Appearance prefigur'd those *whited Sepulchres*, that indeed *appeared beautiful without*: But as they were *within full of Rottenness and all Uncleanness*, and for all the Care that had been taken of them, had yet brought forth no Fruit, and for that Reason were to be destroyed; so 'tis necessary that this Tree shou'd in this particular, *viz.* the Reason of it's being curst; answer to the Antitype, *i. e.* shou'd have yet brought forth no Fruit, notwithstanding the long Time since it might have been expected. This Tree, that had been planted in a fruitful Soil, and had had sufficient Care taken of it, if possible, to make it prolific, and had shew'd all the outward signs of a strong and goodly Tree, but yet had long deceiv'd the Husbandman's Care, and brought forth no Fruit, and consequently



quently in a short Time to be destroy'd, was the only Type of a beloved and favourite People, of a People that shew'd all outward Signs of Goodness, but inwardly cou'd not be induced to bring forth Fruit, and so were destin'd to perish in their Wickedness.



### S E C T. III.

**S**UPPOSING *there had been Fruit on the Tree, yet Jesus had no legal Right to eat of it, nor, if none, to curse it for it's Unfruitfulness.*

**THAT** our *Saviour* in his State of Incarnation was neither Landlord nor Tenant, but poor and necessitous enough, is true beyond Contradiction; *The Foxes have Holes, and the Birds of the Air have Nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his Head* \*. But notwithstanding that, our *Saviour* had a Right to eat of this Tree upon a double

\* Matth. viii. 20.

Account. *First*, by virtue of the *Jewish Law*, under which he was born and lived. *Deut. xxiv. 25.* *Secondly*, by Virtue of his Divinity, as he was Lord of the Creation. Tho' as *Jesus* the Son of Man, he was needy and indigent, a *Man of Sorrows* and acquainted with Grief, yet, as *God blessed for ever*, he had all Nature at his Command, and the Rights and Properties of all Mankind in his Hands, to transfer or resume, as he saw convenient. If *the Earth is the Lords*, and all that therein is, sure the blessed *Jesus* might without Offence have plucked a few Figs, belong to who they wou'd. Mankind are, at best, but Tenants at Will; and surely there can be no Injustice, when the Almighty Landlord resumes his own for a Moment, and takes, for necessary Subsistence, but a small Pittance of what he has given in Abundance and for Nothing, to ungrateful and unworthy Occupiers.

AND if our *Saviour* had a Right to the Fruit of this Tree, had there been any, he had still more Right to curse it for it's Unfruitfulness. Not to mention the little Damage of destroying an uselefs and barren Tree; surely the Great God of the  
Universe

Universe may do what he pleases with his own; He may, one wou'd think, without incurring the Imputation of Injustice, take away so palpable a Means of Delusion from the unwary Traveller, as this Tree might have been to many: If the great Author of Nature can pull down one, and set up another, if he can destroy Kingdoms and Nations with terrible Justice, sure he may destroy a simple unfruitful Tree, without being question'd for it. But if we consider our *Saviour's* grand Design in this Action; if this Act of Execration answer'd so important an End, as to prefigure the sudden and final Destruction of the *Jews*, and to attest the Truth of his Mission in so remarkable a Manner, and by so stupendous a Miracle, then was this Tree justly sacrificed to such a publick Good, and our *Saviour* had a sufficient Reason to curse and destroy it.



SECT.





## S E C T. IV.

**T**O destroy another Man's harmless and inoffensive Tree, is an Act of such a malignant and diabolical Nature, as to be inconsistent with the Character of a good and gracious God.

WHEN Mr Woolston can prove that a barren and fruitless Tree, a Tree that cumbers the Ground where it stands, and subjects all Travellers, that pass by, to Error and Delusion, is a harmless and inoffensive Tree, then we may perhaps allow his ridiculous Arguments, and subscribe to his wild and extravagant Notions. Cut it down why cumbreth it the Ground, is the the authentic Voice both of Reason and Revelation. *A Tree found in a Desert, has no particular Service, any more than a Bramble on a Forest.* BUT supposing, what Mr Woolston wants, that it was really a harmless and inoffensive Tree, nay further, that it was fruitful

fruitful and prolific, and brought forth in Abundance; yet ought not the private Good of one Man to yield to that of a whole Community? Ought so insignificant a Thing as a Fig-Tree to stand in Competition with the Good and Welfare of a whole Nation? There is no general Law, tho' ever so good in itself, but what is some way detrimental to particular Persons: But, for such a Law who ever call'd the Legislature cruel or unjust? Who ever accused them of a malignant and diabolical Nature for such a Procedure? If the general Tenour of this Action was of a pious and charitable Nature, as undoubtedly it was; if to warn the *Jews* of their approaching Ruin, by such an apt Representation, had any Thing of a good and beneficent Design in it, as undoubtedly it had; then sure there was no Injury done to the Proprietor, tho' his Tree (but yet an useless one) was sacrificed to the general Benefit. Thus, (to speak in the Language of Mr *Candler*) *the Thing pretended to be done is such, as is*

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*consistent*

consistent with the Perfections of God to interest himself in; such as answers to the Character of God as a good and gracious Being: and every way as worthy of it's Author, as if instead of curling the Fig-Tree, (according to Mr Woolston's impious Prescription) he had made a dry, dead, and withered one, immediately to bud, flourish, and revive, and in an Instant to have brought forth ripe Fruits out of Season.

F I N I S

